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ABSTRACT

The feeling dimension of students cannot be ignored in teaching and learning situations. Feelings are there and must not be ignored. Reading stresses word recognition, comprehension of subject matter at diverse levels of complexity, and application of what has been learned. A major ingredient so frequently left out is student appreciation of the feeling of dimension of characters in their diverse manifestations. To become increasingly human, the student, with teacher guidance, needs to read, study, and think about those tendencies which make a person unique, novel, and creative. This paper considers existentialism, perennialism, and experimentalism as philosophies of instruction. The paper also discusses the testing and measurement movement, a currently popular movement in terms of state mandated standards for students to achieve. (Contains 10 references.) (NKA)

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The Feeling Dimension in Reading.

by Marlow Ediger

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THE FEELING DIMENSION IN READING

Each person has feelings about the self, about others, about things in the environment, and about life in general. The feeling dimension of students certainly cannot be ignored in teaching and learning situations. Feelings ar there and must not be ignored. Any teacher has listened to students say things such as the following:

1. that is not fair!
2. I don't like ——— .
3. I hate it when hominy is served in the school lunchroom.
4. I love it when Ms. Jones tells stories in our class.
5. I wish that I did not have to keep my room clean at home.

And the list can go on and on. Goleman (1995) has studied the importance of Emotional Intelligence and his thinking is that factors therein are indeed highly important. A person at the work place may lose a job or position due to strong negative feelings toward others or toward the task being pursued. The academics presently receive paramount attention when determining student achievement in school. State mandated tests emphasize reading, writing, and mathematics achievement as major goals of instruction. That is truly important, but it does tend to leave out a vital ingredient in learning and that is the feelings, emotions, and the affective domain. With exit exams in the offing, parents and their offspring worry and fear if the latter will pass the test to receive a high school diploma or pass the test to be promoted to the next grade level. A very low level of student numbers have passed the mandated tests in some states . Each state seemingly is trying to outdo the other with high expectations for students in the name of teacher accountability. The following quote indicates this trend (See Education Week, April 18, 2001):

Despite the intensive push, including all Putnam, Massachusetts tenth graders who took the exam last year, 94% failed the English section, 95% failed in mathematics, and 91% fell short on the science test.

Students and parents, no doubt, have very strong feelings pertaining to the above named test results involving mandated testing.

Student Feelings in Reading Content

There are a plethora of news items pertaining to different kinds of anger. These include road rage, auditorium rage, boat rage, and shopping line rage. The author, as yet, has not

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noticed the term "reading rage" or anger dispensed toward decoding print discourse, listed in the educational literature. In addition, the following negative feelings may be listed: hostility, disgust, envy, sadness, futility, jealousy, hatred, dislike, and frustration, among others. To be sure, there are numerous positive feelings which might well accrue such as joy, love, hope, peace, patience, kindness, acceptance, and helpfulness.

Existentialism, as a philosophy of life, stresses the importance of feeling individuals. Each person is born without his/her will and now must find purpose in life. These purposes are not given to the individual but must be found. It may well be a struggle to deal with encounters in life. Personal decisions need to be made, and there is dread in making many of these decisions. The every day cares and worries are there, and at the end all persons die. Reading materials for students to select from should then emphasize freedom for students to choose which sequential library books to read. Individualism is strong when stressing existentialism as a philosophy of reading. The individual needs to make as many decisions as possible within the framework of being human and possessing traits of humaneness. Numerous concepts then are important to the existentialist, including the following:

1. openness. The reading curriculum is flexible in learners individually selecting what to learn, from among alternatives. The teacher is a guide and motivator of students.
2. knowledge is subjective. Truth tends to reside within the individual.
3. commitment. The individual must make commitments in life.
4. moral judgments. The individual in a free environment needs to be able to make decisions based on morality and ethics (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Two).
5. an irrational world. The world in its social and natural dimensions is not rational. The late Jean Paul Sartre, a leading existentialist wrote the following:

Man is nothing but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism. It is also what is called subjectivity, the name we are labeled with when charges are brought against us. But what do we mean by this, if not that man has a greater dignity than a stone or table? For we mean that man first exists, that is, man is first of all the being who hurls himself toward a future and who is conscious of imagining himself as being in the future, Man is at the start a plan which is aware of himself, rather than a patch of moss, a piece of garbage, or cauliflower; nothing exists prior to this plan; there is

nothing in heaven; man will be what he will have planned to be. Not what he will want to be. Because by the word "will" we generally mean a conscious decision, which is subsequent to what we have already made of ourselves. I want to belong to a political party, write a book, get married; but all this only a manifestation of an earlier more spontaneous choice that is called "will." But if existence really does precede essence, man is responsible for what he is. Thus, existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest upon him. And when we say that a man is responsible for himself, we not only mean that he is responsible for his own individuality , but that he is responsible for all men (quoted in Ediger, 1995, 27- 28).

Perennialism

Perennialism as a philosophy of instruction emphasizes the importance of classical literature for students to read. Classical literature has endured in time and space. Perennialism stresses literature written by great minds of the past. It emphasizes what is stable and not subject to change in terms of advocating quality literature. The literature is considered to aid in developing the intellectual powers, not the psychomotor domain. It is non vocational in nature. In classical literature, there is a common strand of ideas which are important at all times and in all places. General education is then begin emphasized. Communication of ideas with others is possible with all possessing a common body of knowledge. Literature which endures tends to weed out what is transitory and trivial. O' Neill (1981) wrote the following;

Accordingly, educational intellectualism tends to be past orientated and to emphasize stability --- the continuity of the great, enduring ideas --- over change. In general, the eternal truths are best represented in the abiding networks of the world's greatest minds as they are conveyed through the cultural heritage of mankind. The overall goal of education is to identify , preserve and transmit essential Truth (that is the central principles that govern the underlying meaning and significance of life). More specifically, the intermediate role of the school as a particular social institution is to teach the students how to think (that is, how to reason and transmit the best thought (the enduring wisdom) of the past.

In contemporary education, philosophical conservation expresses itself primarily as educational intellectualism, which encompasses two basic variations; philosophical

intellectualism and theological intellectualism. Philosophical intellectualism .... tends to place great emphasis upon traditional "liberal arts" education in the spirit of "The Great Books." Recent literature is not classical since it may not be relevant in the ensuing years to come. Writings such as the following represent the classics

1. The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne.
2. My Shadow by Robert Louis Stevenson.
3. Hamlet by William Shakespeare.
4. Twenty - One Tales by Leo Tolstoy.
5. Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens.

Charles Dickens, a nineteenth century writer in England, had very strong feelings about the living and working conditions of poor people. His vivid descriptions of the soot from factories, the unhealthy pollution in the environment, the long working hours and misuse of children, poverty of the working class, and the meaningless of life are central themes in Dicken's writings. The feeling dimension is very important to notice in his classical writings

Many of the classical writings may be obtained in simplified form. There is even a comic book called Classical Comics which has many picture clues and simplified writings to indicate the classics. Many students seemingly are fascinated with their content such as Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn by Samuel Hawthorne Clemens, better known as Mark Twain. Later on, students may read the original versions. Mother Goose rhymes written for young children have stood the test of time and may be placed into the category of the classics (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Six).

Most recently, advocates of perennialism have revised their stand pertaining to classical literature in advocating that the teacher choose a library book, even one published recently, which is of interest to learners and on their understanding level to read. The teacher then becomes a discussion leader to discuss with students challenging and fascinating ideas contained in the book. The purpose is to obtain student interest in reading. Students then need to be motivated and encouraged to do more reading and become interested in comprehending and discussing. In the discussions, there are no facts for students to memorize, but rather learners are to think and reason about literature. interest in reading emphasizes the feeling dimension of learners, and the content of the teacher's selected books for children to read can be strong on the feeling

dimension of story characters.

Student reaction in terms of feelings to content read should be freely sought and expressed in an orderly way. Respect for the thinking of each student is important. Disruption and biases toward others should be eliminated. A quality discussion to be successful requires the cooperation of all involved (Ediger, 2001, Chapter Eight).

Experimentalism as a Philosophy of Reading Instruction

Experimentalism as a philosophy of life was advocated strongly by John Dewey (1859- 1952). Dr. Dewey did not separate the feeling dimension from knowledge and skills possessed by an individual (See Dewey, 1916). Thus, the total individual is engaged in learning. Dividing an individual into component parts does not represent the totality of a human being. Thus, in reading, the student ideally should be wholeheartedly involved in the act of reading, not a separate component facet. Reading becomes a means to an end, not an end in and of itself. To illustrate this concept, the following is involved in the total act of thinking:

1. within a stimulating environment, the individual with teacher assistance selects a problem to be solved. The problem arises out of curiosity and interest. Clarity in problem selection is important. Interest and effort in problem solving become one, not separate entities.
2. information needs to be gathered from a variety of sources in answer to the problem. The concept variety is vital to consider. Reading then is one source of salient information. The wholeness of learning opportunities needs to be considered in bringing information to bear upon the identified problem area.
3. an hypothesis is then developed which consists of a temporary solution to the problem. The hypothesis is to be evaluated to increase certainty in degrees of correctness of the answer. Evaluation may consist of additional reading, study, and thought.
4. the hypothesis is accepted if it is upheld in the evaluation. If not, additional reading and other resources need to be used to develop a new hypothesis which also will need to evaluated.

Reading materials are then selected on the basis of

1. being interesting so that interest and effort put forth to read are one, not separate components. interest is a motivating device.

2. providing information to solve identified problems. What is read provides content to solve a problem. The subject matter read and the problem are one, not separate items.
3. giving information to test an hypothesis. Practical values in reading are then salient (See Ediger, 2000, 131-135).

Dr. Dewey was a strong advocate of students working together in committees. Why? In society, problems are identified and solved. Thus, schools should be miniature societies, not separate from each other. Then too, students enjoy working together, not separately.

Problems identified might well pertain to the feeling dimension of persons in society. As students then read about the feeling dimension as a problem to be solved, the use of previously acquired knowledge may be used to understand the new content. They also use different skills such as word recognition and diverse levels of cognition to evaluate information.

Testing and Measurement Movement

The testing and measurement movement is very popular presently in terms of state mandated standards for students to achieve. Student achievement is then shown though test results. A numeral indicates achievement such as a percentile, a standard deviation, a grade equivalent, and/or a stanine. Generally a percentile is used since it it easiest to understand. Thus, for example, a student from test results in reading achievement may be on the sixtieth percentile. In measurement philosophy, test results are to be highly specific such as a number to indicate learner achievement. Objectivity then is desired such as in

1. all students take the same reading test.
2. time limits for test taking are the same for all.
3. directions for test taking are the same.
4. conditions for giving the test, too, are standardized.
5. the same key is used to score all multiple choice test items, using machine scoring (Ediger, 2001, Chapter Sixteen).

The testing and measurement movement stresses fairness in testing through all students experiencing the same test items regardless of ability levels possessed. No provisions are generally made for individual differences unless for the handicapped under certain conditions.

Multiple choice test items contain a stem and four

distractors. Each test item is separate from the other so that no clues are given in answering any multiple choice test item correctly. There is no sequence then in having students perceive the relationship of one test item to the next. Validity in testing occurs if the teacher has emphasized the state standards/objectives of instruction in the classroom. Reliability must be determined in pilot studies through test/retest, split half, and/or alternate forms. All state mandated tests given to students should be pilot tested to take out the kinks and weaknesses of each test item.

With objectivity being a key element in the testing and measurement movement, little leeway exists for noting the feeling dimension of individuals. Feelings are subjective to the involved individual. There are tests to measure feelings of individuals and obtain objective data from machine scoring of these test results, but the personal dimension is left out pertaining to the individual's aspirations, goals, struggles, anxiety, tension, joy, and wishes. Nor does a student write subjective sequential paragraphs pertaining to how one feels toward a certain object, political party, law, codes of informal/formal conduct, and attempts to indoctrinate by the state or nation. To emphasize the feeling dimension in literature, state mandated tests need to stress a section whereby essay test writing is in evidence in which the student composes subjective content to reflect personal thoughts on a self chosen topic. Rubrics could be developed to make the scoring of these essays more reliable in that the scorers might agree on how to assess the written products.

In Closing

Reading stresses word recognition, comprehension of subject matter at diverse levels of complexity, and application of what has been learned. A major ingredient so frequently left out is student appreciation of the feeling dimension of characters in their diverse manifestations. What makes human beings different from each other, among other items, is their individual aspirations, intrinsic motivations possessed, unconscious and conscious behavior, as well as the affective makeup. To become increasingly human, the student with teacher guidance needs to read, study, and think about those tendencies which make persons unique, novel, and possess creative qualities. Each person lives in a world of human beings and needs to interact positively with others. Literature in the curriculum should assist students to develop feelings of empathy, caring for each other,

belonging, and being recognized for what has been achieved personally (Ediger, 1995, 59-60).

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